

A U B A D E



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Susan Steffe
"Pinecones"

MISINTERPRETATION

Few people understand a dawn—
They talk of “rosy-fingered maids” and never see
Precisely what she is, this sun in rags
Who comes, predictable and strong
A washerwoman armed with pails of suds,
With scrub-brushes and sponges—
Lifts firey petticoats and strides,
Grinning, at seven o’clock
over ragged roofs;
Peers about, then stands and frankly stares
(A dirty job, to wash away the night!)
To her knees, then.
Brusquely, from the bucket, sopping, lift
the saturated sponge and slap it, mopping,
Onto the very floor of heaven, brutally scour,
and scrub again.
And plunge the meaty forearm up to its raw hilt
In chill, carbonic flame—
Sponge and sweep and splash, dissolve the night
And send it scudding to the west: the sun grows
Orange with exertion, all-immersing,
Vigorous, grunting, dogged, cursing,
Rhythmic, thrusting, jerking—
Working...
Clambers to her feet, picks up her pail, and stands
Fist-on-hip in grudging admiration
For the rough work on her own hand,
Stoops, and as parting coup de grace
(Someone to speak of “blessing hills with light”?)
She overturns her bucket on the land.

Laura Abenes

THE DAY

This is the day.
The lights down in the city
Turn into the lights of the dawn.
This is the day.

This is breakfast.
The black coffee turns into cold coffee.
The toast oversleeps and turns black in the toaster,
Like the color of the sky before dawn.
This is breakfast.

This is poetry.
It sparkles like the lights down in the city.
It turns the breakfast into lunch
and the morning into afternoon.
It turns the afternoon into ghosts:
Michael and Catherine
My mother and my father together
A clean conscience and peace of mind
Love.
These are memories.
I will never sit and drink coffee
with any of them again.

These are tears.
They come from the memories.
They fall in the coffee and turn black,
Like the color of the old woman
Who stood by an empty mailbox in western Maryland.
I was driving my car
and just happened to see her.

I can never forget.
She was crying two small streams of tears,
Not at the empty box
but at the trick the day had played.

This is the room
Where the last rays of sunlight come.
The light comes in the low window
at a low angle,
and runs across the black rug
until it bumps into the white wall.

There are shelves of books on the white wall,
but none of them are white
and none of them are black.
The books are full of the things
that people have said about cities and love.
These people are wrong.

I sit in a corner away from the books,
Looking away from the light.
My palms sweating
My teeth grinding.
And my ghost sits in the air above me,
Chanting:
This is the day.
This is the day.

Dale E. Williams



Scott Ligon and
David Spatz

were not a single wreath
for david beals

evergreen shadow cool in the cold
 against the thin lines
 of bare limbed deciduous

a corner of the plot less-visited
 where a single wreath leans
 against a little slab of granite
 that is not the only slab of granite

and one pine is disfigured into prominence
 against all the rest
 as human as a tree can pretend

a fool's moon
at the peak of its arc
with stars in obliteration
 the post-romantic suggestion
 of preference—
 highlighting the discovery
 of otherwise indifference

but here a boxwood is immense
and overshadows its darker semblance

the only moving thing declines its light
 gradually.
the only living things move as with wind.
the only living, moving thing stops
 to think

were a cloud to come by

Shannon Elder

SHARON IN HER FOURTH MONTH

in Spring,
when doors
and windows are opened
cautiously,
some of the women
who appear out of doors
are heavy and rounded.
all winter
the snow kept them in
and they all dreamed of water.

this Spring,
I join them
molded in the shape
of what is to come.
I think of the Vermont winter:
how snow overwhelmed all,
how it heaped up on the lawn,
and lay breathing deeply on the roof.
the mailbox
had to be shoveled to,
only to be found frozen shut.
and at night,
under the feather-lead weight
of many blankets
I heard the firs creaking
in the cold:
I would wake
and think they called me,
whispering a prophecy or name
of what would grow in me.
Perhaps I should have listened closer.

in this deep country
I woke this morning
to notice the snow
had passed away
and faded into moist, brown earth.
it dripped from the silver gutter pipes
and glistened wet on the street.
I thought:
this is a fine beginning.
what was conceived
now waits to be birthed,
Spring swells,
and I break into two.

Lisa Dittrich

SONG FROM WEST VIRGINIA

“From this valley they say
you are going.”

Uncle Billy’s singing was like the yelping
of the orange hounds, calling for their supper.

His head thrown back

Closed eyes turned up towards unfinished chestnut beams

Supporting the roof

Supporting the snow.

I wondered if it hurt to have whiskers
that stuck into your adam’s apple.

“We will miss your bright eyes
and sweet smile.”

The chirps from a rosewood mandolin
excused a cracking voice.

Grandma kept time with the black oak rocker
by the Ben Franklin stove.

Her white spider fingers gripped the arms
as if she thought the chair might break.

I took the old grey tom
from his “Cool-Whip” bowl of milk
wishing I had fur.

“But remember that red, river valley
that has brightened our pathways awhile.”

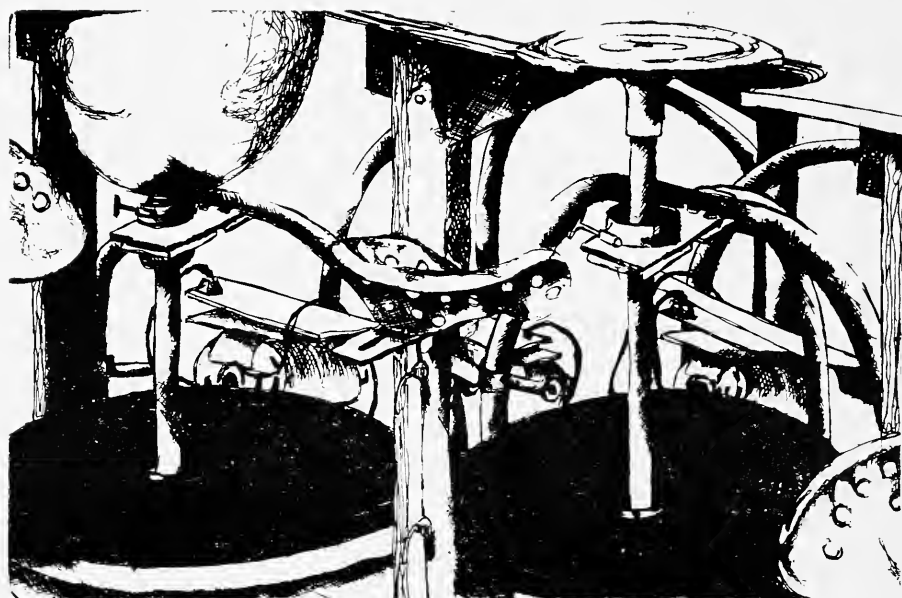
The waves of heat from the black iron stove
covered me with sleep.

Like the snow on the catfish pond.

Uncle Billy talked about the work
the snow had made for the railroad crew,
and I fell asleep

smelling coffee
to dream of baskets full of huckle berries.

Dale E. Williams



Susan Steffe

LIVING THE GREEN LIFE

for Jimmy, in hopes of...

Floating thru dingy smoke and slow motion disco
molasses, He

Flushes Marlboro smoke away somewhere with Jack
Daniels and

swings desperate gazes above
shimmering myriads of jaded ladies whose superficial
frozen lies rise amid fumes like moldy gold to
nowhere.

Minty Glitter Queens cluster in
rusty sparkles and

stars on faces and He
knows He must suffocate or say yes to the
wretched futility of

survival or give that Tangerine Vision of

Creamy Virgins and Morning Glory Passions
one last try.

At first he thought She was only that
Sweet Hope's relection,

an apparition wrapped in milky silk and
shooting back from a hazy corner His own

electricity and He
knows He has not been wrong nourishing
for countless hours

An Ideal.

So eager is He to embrace that Fruitful Hope that
when She whitely ripples
to His side He
reveals that Dreams come true and He
has always craved Snowy Love:
a secret fantasy.

But she drunkenly lifts an olive-shrouded hand to
slosh toward His misty glass
another shot
from that lime-label bottle and He
in numbness
reveals that dreams never come and
feels that fruitless hope
drop away and drag itself
out of touch while
she smiles her shamrock smile and asks Him
for His definition of
love...

Kim McCall

POSTCARD OF CLINTON, MASS.

The mill towns squat along
the beer can river banks
like wretched wrens on an
abandoned power line,
towns that were never proud
even when they were new.
They front a swaggering
stance like a tavern tough.
The row houses huddle
hidden gravel alleys.
They hide their curtailless
windows with lights turned low.
Garish, the bar lights glow.
The swingshift workers seek
their crayola entries,
with plant uniforms still
reeking of burnt nylon.
Forty cent beer, each glass
fondled in burn scared hands
and bought with next week's pay.
While the old-eyed children
with professional ease
smoke hand rolled joints in stone
derelict warehouses.

Sue Mathieu



Karen MacDowell

VIEW FROM MIRANDA

The glistening dome that hangs above my head

Protects the only pine tree on Miranda...
I sit beneath it. Saturn's swirling mists
And subtle shifts of color fill the sky.
Braided rings glitter and twist in starlight.
We are falling away forever, suspended in darkness
Between a shrunken sun and a ball of gas...

Outside, there is nothing but vacuum. A frozen crust,
A jumble of rock and ice. The rime that coats the
boulders
Reflects the light of distant suns. It never melts.

Sheltered by the dome's transparent skin
The tree survives, grows, even reproduces
Bringing forth futile cones. Like other living things
It is primitive, and stubborn. We are, both of us,
complex,
Crudely structured. Surrounded by precision
And smooth hard surfaces, we breathe manufactured
air,
A careful mixture of gases. Water and light
Are ceaselessly regulated. Even the soil
is sterile.

Why did we come here?
The tree is silent, unmoved. No wind sings
in the branches.
The stiff jade needles do not stir. They provide
No answers. The rigid bark allows
No secrets to penetrate from within or from without.
Perhaps, if you watch closely enough
A single needle, dislodged by some unintelligible
force
Will drift down from the branches. It will lie lightly
atop
the heap of needles huddled at the base of the tree,
Keeping it warm and alive at the frost-gnawed root.

Pamela S. Chadwick



Karen MacDowell
“Swiss cheese in ‘space’”

MUD RIVER ROAD

Once I walked along abandoned tobacco run:
Two laned goat paths that strayed between
Some hill farmer's Christmas money crop.
Grasshoppers in their fall coats
Of khaki green or olive brown,
Flew glistening on old newspaper wings;
So many that a January hail storm
Would have sounded softer.
The little gray clouds of dust
Each made when landing, lingered on
To fade long after each had winged away
Through the brittle September heat.
A single cricket sang from the cool mulch
Beneath the knot of rooted weeds - unseen
A burnished black lacquered harpist.
I did not seek its hidden pillered home,
I sought no ones hearth then, not even mine
As I drove grasshoppers into the wind.

Sue Mathieu

Dust floats through the
evening air and falls to the
sand where it cracks like an
egg in the hand of a child. A rose-colored
rooster sits on a thorn
and waits for rain.

Alicia Casacuberta

CATHERINE INCHOATE

- I. We like to picture
a genie that sleeps
beneath Catherine's face

He stays to enchant away
any questioning of what
those eyes might tell us

We do not see her
lying drunk on the floor
some Saturday nights
or hear her mocking laugh
as she passes
on the other side of the street
with a friend
We are not her friends

We only watch her face
fascinated
by the way it hurts us

II. Such lines
a pity they must end
sealed off with flesh
but that silkdust layer
is deluged in gold
in our eyes

A greengold starfish
waves in the
pearlslow tidal wash
but when the closer look comes
it's gone

And no one will
keep waving forever
at the spot where
gilded softness disappeared
or at the pupils of green eyes

We are reconciled
to stop at the fluid sweep
of temple to cheek
into jaw into throat
Stop at a pure inchoate face
silver rings round golden fingers
pearltipped in a frame
and to let the wide eyes
remain shoaled motionless

Carol Swain

loveshopping at the a&p

you
pick over me
like the housewife
at vegetable counters.

squeezing at my ripe
parts
of person
ality.

at the a&p,
picking sorting fondling
out the garbage
saving the sweet soft fruit
not worrying about later
and what to do with the seeds and rind.
is this any way to shop?

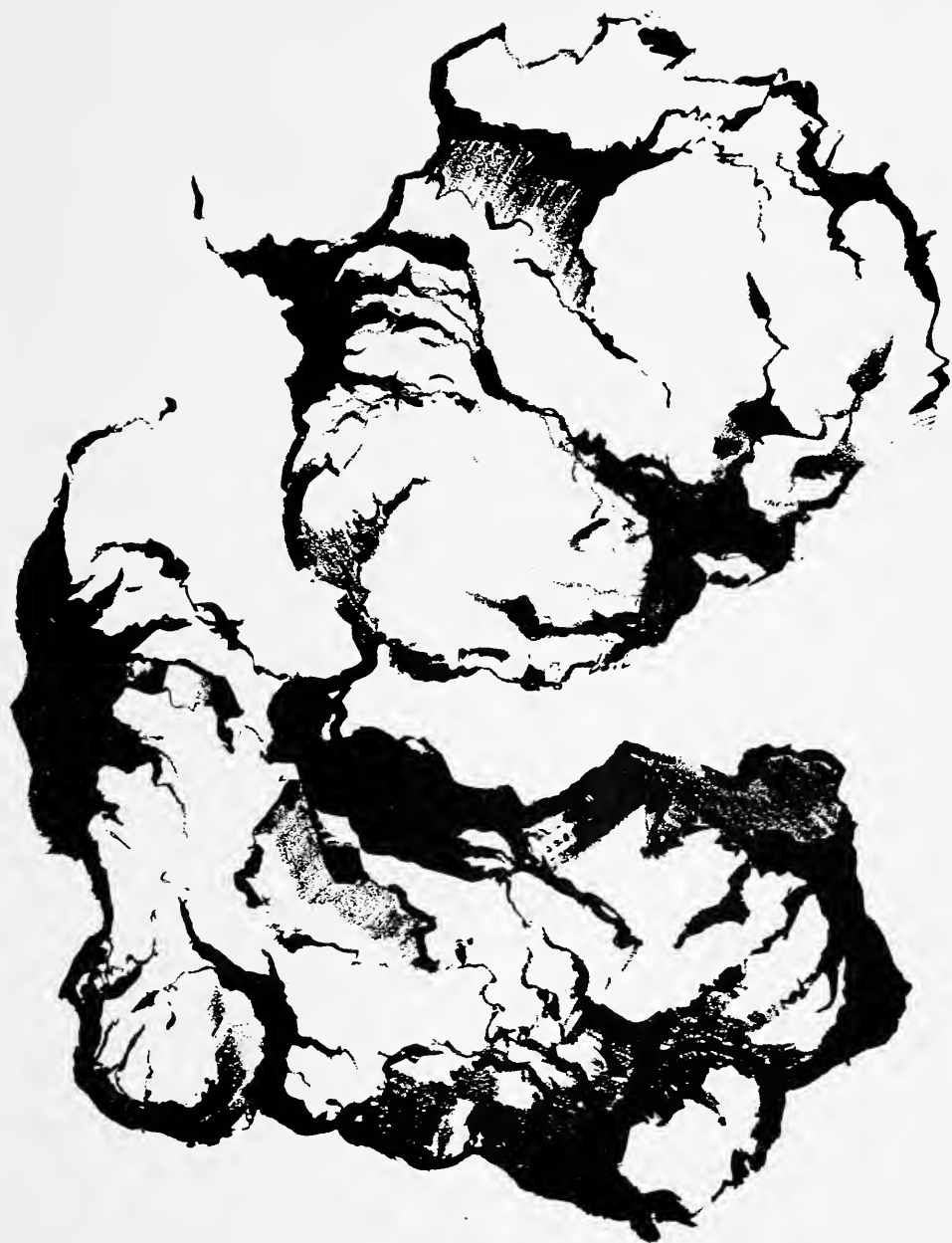
you inadvertently
pluck a tomato
on the bottom
avalanching them
careening fruits
and you are unable
to deal with this mess.

i said is this any way to shop?
fueling my wrath and passion
like avalanching tomatoes
i will crumble and fly at your feet
is this what you want?
love shopping in the a&p
only it's me you scrutinize
not the lables
just like a housewife
consuming
and economy-conscious.

C. France



Faith Strong
"Betty's Ex"



Karen MacDowell

THE GLIDING POINT

The self-battered despise deformity
and the final softness of flesh
which craves to be held
The steel they worship white hot
bleeds fire when beaten out flat
but cools complete and unyielding
Pounding and reshaping will only
beat out the body's raw colors
A betrayal in salt and bruises

An unfilled glass
blends with air
shatters easily
just flies apart and lies
glittering until swept away
We are not so insensibly brittle
Not so parched Broken
much of us would soak into the earth

What is left stands alone
a featherless bird waiting
for some salient wind
to be taken to the gliding point

A gliding point which rarely comes
and after wings beat air

Carol Swain

**IT IS THE NIGHT
THAT MOVES ME**

It is the night
that moves me
into O-
blivion
(being right next to
Persia, just East of
hell's kitchen)

I am moved
Here,
and seated at
a table where
dimestore Dandelions
are scattered like
gold coins
on the cherry-wood.

the next-door woman
makes heavy
italy food
her children holler
in grey t-shirts
bay leaves
flutter fragrant
from her window

Oblivion.
just over the Bridge
where You at
that scratched
table
write Songs and
drink tap-watered
wine.

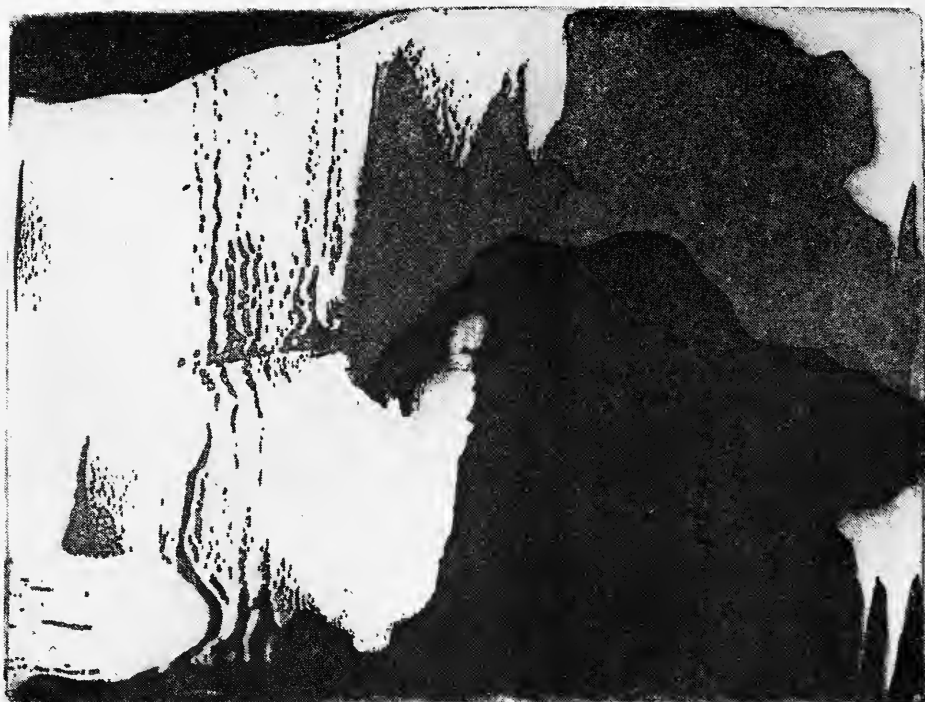
your hand
on the table—
deep-creased knuckles
veins raised turquoise—
taps time away before
me.

Here in Oblivion
You are my refuge.
Or so I believe.
And I believe in
Wickedness, too.

the alley stones
baked hot today
I hear a fire hydrant
gushing splashes
the next-door lady's
children scream
burning hot and cold.

It is the night that
moves me Here,
Bum whistling down
your drunken weekend
streets.
I will not sleep
on your patchy bed.
Standing by the window
(I will) tug the
lint from your
wool blanket
around me
will watch
for the blood-
beating heart
of a Sun
which makes me
motionless
still
Here.

Lisa Dittrich



Karen MacDowell



Laura Popkins
"Chinatown"

WALNUT

Walnut: compressed wisdom,
tiny vegetable turtle,
brain of elf
paralyzed for eternity.

Susan Rogalski

HAIKU

The mute finds a voice:
Tinkling of metallic pipes,
Breeze on a windchime.

Mary Yee

TENEMENT WOMEN

I watch from outside, as
The women gaze blankly out of streaked windows
Held captive in cramped, sweltering rooms
Steaming of bleach and spaghetti, diapers and garlic.
The sound of shrill voices intrude through thin walls.

But heavily they walk and they stand and
Escape to their rickety porches and stairs
Rigid barred railings never quite free them
As they beat their thin rugs, hang up fading clothes
Gossip and talk in the air.

Let loose to this world outside their domains
Husbands at factories, most children at school
Some women and cats hide under the stairs
And avoid what is there to be seen.
But this kingdom of theirs is not theirs alone
For the echos remind them of how they exist.

Dogs sharply barking, small babies screaming
Children running and yelling for Mama
The bustling motion of laundry and chasing
is stirred by occasional breezes.

Still stifling air gives relief from inside
The beating sun dries the sails of their sheets
As they sway on the lines looking knowingly down
On the tenements sweating and breathing of life.
And not trees, but the sheets, filter sunlight to them
And block their view of the sky.
Within this close world they are held and are bound
Never glimpsing the rich world outside.

Erin Devine



Faith Strong
"Pickles"

WYETH WAITS FOR SPRING

The kitchen table by the window,
covered with white damask,
is set for one.

A silver knife rests beside
the white porcelain plate, and
the cup and saucer, also white,
sit to the side.

The window, whose wrinkled panes are
clean and clear,
has a white sill.

The sun streams through,
spilling a patch of light upon

the patterned wallpaper-
old and yellow-
sprinkled with summer flowers.

Outside the window, freshly cut wood lies
protected within the barbed wire fence.
Dry and brittle, the brown grass waits
for spring to come, giving it water and life.

Suspicious shadows on the grass
suggest a stranger out there, by the wood.
The shape it makes is new and unknown,
so I peek past the sill to see.

He is groundhog.

Martha Weber



Linda Warsaw

RELEASE

The leaf, released
flutters violently to the ground
As it falls
it shakes the world

It churns the air
like a rock disturbing the even flow of a stream
trailing behind it
swirling psychedelic designs

The whisper it makes is a scream
In protest it catches the air
slowing its progress
down and down

Into the chaos
blindly falling, shivering
Winding down
towards the end

Headlong it still falls
For a moment the air is still
Even the leaf gives up its protest
Run out of time and space
Nearly exhausted of its energy
The leaf crashes to the ground

It is silence shattering
I can hear nothing else
not my heart
not my thoughts

All I hear are the leaves
crashing to the ground

It is deadening
For a moment
it is release

Sean Duffy

MESSAGE FOUND IN A BOTTLE

Neptune's eyes—green, piercing,
with a dark furrow above,
must have been like yours.
A strange godlike creature
who towers above me, mocks me,
keeps me under a spell.

I'm floating.
A sea urchin
covered with prickly, jagged thorns.
Tentacles, protruding from deep
black pores keep me safe,
estranged.

An urging ocean carries me
in rough swells. Swallowing
salty brine, I cling
to save myself,

but one by one
you lift my arms.
caressing my barbed edges,
teasing with damp hands.
I fall back into endless waves,
silently groaning
because I have no mouth.

Lee Ann McDonnell



Susan Steffe

A GUEST

Because of a woman
whose skin was cracked so
the ocean salt burnt her,
you are here now.
You refuse to walk on the boardwalk,
buy a lemon ice, or wear a hat.
You nap in the afternoons, smug
that you sleep well here.
In the mornings you walk
to the pulse of the sunrise,
and I know you secretly await
the transformation the cracked woman
promised would visit you here.
You sit at the gulf's edge,
an unshifting dune,
shedding only skin.
You could, at least, pretend
to tan but tomorrow you won't
be able to comb your hair
or to sleep under sheets tonight.
I will have to rub you with vinegar,
a task I relish.
You will fall asleep eventually
smelling of Easter and skimming bits
of poetry off your brain, repeating
the woman's words, your perverse litany:
After I saw the ocean, I was never the same.

Carol Swain

LOSING FRIENDS

for Jeanne

She had a gathering
of plants
in the window.
Morning sunlight
brushed them
with gentle yellow
and cast a jungle shadow
on the opposite, white wall.

She had a black cat
that curled around itself
under a glass-topped table
on the shaggy white
living-room rug.

Jeanne,
is this you?
Stark details
of someone's life
glare out at me —
it's how I want
to remember you,
you who are so vague.
I recall:
sunlight
made the glasses of iced tea
glimmer and sweat.
Your cigarette smoke
fluttered up to turn
into a dusty haze
in the yellow/white beam
that leaned against the table.

It was the apartment
of a witch:
it cast a spell.
Browne on the turntable,
sheaves of poetry
fluttering
on a breeze.

I hate this,
when spirit
kisses spirit,
and one flies away,
laughing —
I cling.
But this memory
is wrong.
It errs
and it bleeds.
If I could hear from you
if we could share
that love of books and lyrics again
I would see that light
like morning sun
it would touch my hair

and bring out the gold:
I would shine.

Lisa Dittrich



Merrie Beth Sexton

TO MY BROTHER

We were younger,
when this need to cling
to each other
late at night
through rushing rainstorms
brought you to my room.

We would huddle
under a quilt
that Mama made before she died
and you would slide
your legs down
under the covers and
press your head to my pillow
then I would crawl in beside you
and you would open your arms and
draw me against your flanneled shoulder.

I remember the night I cried
because Lucky died
and you said cats can go to heaven too
then you kissed my hair
and licked my tears with a tongue
that was not unlike Lucky's—
scratchy yet soft and warm.

Remember that awful Christmas
when it didn't snow at all and
Papa got drunk—again—and toppled
the Christmas tree and
all those shiny little mirror balls broke
into a glistening heap of shattered light
that colored your foot with crimson
when you fell into it
and the bleeding
wouldn't stop
and I was afraid
you were going to die
so I told you,
“If you die then I will too.”

But we lived.
That night I stayed in your room
with your foot on a pillow
and your head on my breast;
we slept with our hands
on each other's hearts
to make sure that the beating
would never stop.

Laura Abenes



Linda Warsaw
"Asparagus Fern"

haiku makura no

- | | | |
|------|---|---|
| I. | sizukasa ya
hono-jiroi kiku
hatsu-yuki no | quietness—
soft-white chrysanthemums
of the first snow |
| II. | sabishisa ya
yoi cha desu to cho
asagao ni | loneliness—
the tea is good with butterfly
on morning glory |
| III. | kinuginu no
wakare tsuki no ya
makura ka no | lovers
parting in morning moonlight—
fragrant pillow |

Michael Huff

memoires de suburbanalite

franglais
postcards
of the brahma
to my yogi in indiana
will announce how we've failed till now.

westchestercounty a bountiful
account of how
the U.S. hankers for
cheezwhiz
in a jar-o.

little boxes similario
mystify our nextdoor joneses
teach our mini
come-up executives
of niggertown and the barrio
of supplies and tanqueray
for the cock
tail and bar-b-cue.

hip hip the fortune 500 or
so, the "no-print" frigidaire
congoleum or old linoleum
fonduely life-styled
dirty air.

o say, jose, can you see
about a tiny gun for me
to fall asleep
sur christian dior
is not always so secure
in so long
as they, say, stay
in their space
not to covet my cold heart cash-o.

C. France



Merrie Beth Sexton

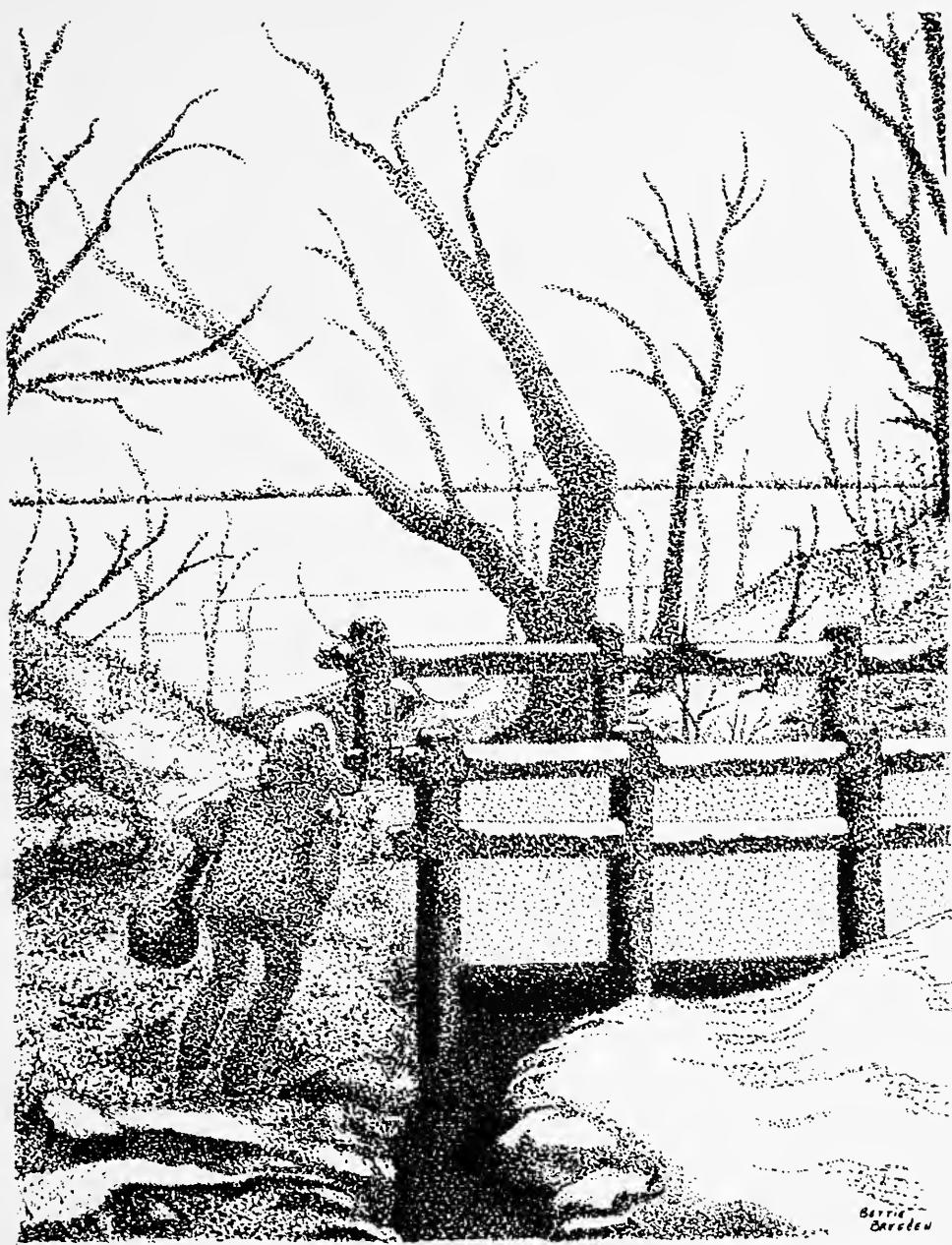


Susan Steffe
“Crab Claws”

BEETLE TRIVIA

I did not see it coming,
that sudden black flash
of humanity. Some altar boy
extinguished me, like the bearer
of a tarnished candle snuffer.
Limbleless, gutless, senseless,
even God does not claim me.
Only the scavenger flies come
to make a wholesome meal
of my remains. If they leave
enough of me here, some child
Einstein will scrape me up
and preserve a gleaming green casket
by sticking silver voodoo pins
through my now (conveniently)
flattened back and two-inch
wing span. I am supposed to feel
no pain. Alive—a helpless victim,
full of venomous threats.
Dead—a young boy's entry
in the local science fair.
Like a lucky coin, face down;
but a nearly perfect specimen,
except for a few missing legs
which lie somewhere, limp,
on the sidewalk.

Lee Ann McDonnell



Bettie Breedon

yule

splintered wood ashes and dust
jesus christmas, i'm no carpenter
planed grains and shavings rave
above the drone-on saw
 drone-on
 see,

i prefer the parasites of the north
whispering snow to the southern
wet christmasses
newengland could make me right-on
 drone-on
she sings, "it's comin' on christmas
 they're cuttin' down trees"
lovejoy and peace
in the north they leave splintered trunks
exposed to harsh elements
an unholyland gusty wind, the skitter
of glacier breath down their
rings of age
freezing
to the slow moan slow motion drifts
blanketing feilds of stumps
parasites of the north
frozen traditions are unknown
to these slowfolk
who enter a house wet and rained down
during the holidays
(old ladies of the north smell and weigh like
DRIED apples)
steel versus wood, harbors of arbor
laboring to smooth a jagged tree amputee
in a carpenter's field of stumps
christmas cheer, he speculates,
to all life on earth

C. France

